

Exhausted

Sermon for Pentecost Monday

Sermon Text: Numbers 11:11-12, 14-17, 24-30

Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You lay the burden of all this people on me?"¹² Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that You swore to give their fathers?...¹⁴ I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me.¹⁵ If You will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in Your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."¹⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.¹⁷ And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone" ...²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent.²⁵ Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.²⁶ Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp.²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."²⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them."²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit on them!"³⁰ And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

"I've had enough." Johan Sebastian Bach Maria sang this in his 22nd cantata. In the aria that he presented in Leipzig around 1727, Bach leads us into a deep melancholy. It is a melancholy that many people would like to loudly echo: the mother of 8 children after she endured the daily struggle to survive once again with her children; the person who had to endure two decades with a joint venture and experienced around 256 job applications, 12 policies, and 13 so-called professional development courses; the person who, after 8 years of waiting, still doesn't have the right to remain in Germany; as well as the soldiers who have to experience an enormous hell during war; and last but not least, a person who is tired of life in their old age and is looking forward to death. They have all had enough! We have had enough!

I have had enough! The Israelites said this too. They had had enough of all sorts of deserts that were placed before them every day. It even appeared better to go back into slavery in Egypt. They could only think about the pots of meat the Egyptians had. They wanted to go back and would give everything they had so that they could have the Egyptian "McDonalds" again.

And Moses couldn't continue on either. He is perhaps the one we can understand best of all. Before God had called him, he was leading a pretty decent life. With good reasons, he first vehemently resisted being appointed by God as an Israelite leader. When he was then persuaded, he became a very sensible desert prophet. Once, he even gave himself as a sacrifice as he said: "God, please kill me and let the people of Israel live." But now, when the people of Israel start to complain again, it was too much for

Moses. Moses had had enough. He wanted to finally give in, resign his position, and give up. These people here are not my children. You can do what you want with them, God. It's ultimately up to You.

We celebrate Pentecost today. That is the birthday of the Church. The Church is God's people of the New Testament. The New Testament people of God are in many ways similar to the people of Israel. There are the ones who simply have had enough of what they are served up in church every Sunday. Some even long to go back to what is happening outside of the church. They fancy other religions and other things that engage them instead of constantly focusing on the old "manna" of the Church. They would even rather let themselves be enslaved by Satan than digest all that stuff on a Sunday. Perhaps even some of you have similar questions, perhaps you think: "Oh, what if I had stayed in Iran? Then I wouldn't have had to risk this difficult path in a new land. Everything was better back then!"

Even pastors are true desert prophets in times of crisis. You can hear it all over the country. They are tired of it, they don't want to anymore, they suffer burnout and complain about the failure of the church.

There is just one thing for such a situation: If something doesn't work anymore, you have to go to the executive level, talk with the highest-ranking executive, and if you're absolutely sure of yourself, you can even threaten him with your resignation. Moses actually did exactly that. He went to the topmost executive – He went to God. I've had enough, God. In any case, the Israelites are not my children, but Yours. Now watch how You deal with them. I am at my wit's end. But God, who had to listen to the complaints of the people and of Moses, finds a very practical solution to the problem. Moses will get some help. He should appoint 70 men and these men will share the burden. At first glance, the idea appears to be very obvious. Why not get your opponents on board? Then they would see how they can make things better for the people. At second glance, however, it is an extremely risky undertaking. What if the 70 men would rise up against Moses and stage a mutiny? Things like that were always happening. But God now steps between the people and Moses. The 70 should not just be let loose among the people, they will receive a special ability. A spiritual miracle should occur. The 70 men should be moved by God's Spirit and be completely empowered. The Bible describes this with the simple sentence: they were beside themselves. You can't understand this being beside yourself as if they were like some crazy people in funny clothes dancing around like headless chickens. The 70 elders surrounding Moses were less concerned with being beside themselves than with being in God. There was a job to do. They could only accomplish this task with God and not on their own. That's why the 70 men are given special abilities so that they would act according to God's Will. People can't do that naturally for the simple reason that they don't have God's mind. They also don't have the ability to believe in God or do His Will on their own. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him," Martin Luther says in his explanation of the third article of the Creed. Have you already heard this sentence or perhaps even thought it yourself: "That's what you Christians say, it's all nice stuff but I can't believe in God." When you heard that or said it yourself, then you have the right understanding. It's not just you, it's every single human being, every Christian too. That's what it must have been like for the 70 men surrounding Moses. Without God, they were useless. But with God and His Spirit, something phenomenal can happen. And what a phenomenon: after He had prepared the 70 elders, God then rained down quail from heaven. What a feast! Imagine that one of you received a spiritual gift and suddenly had the power to distribute German passports here in the church! And maybe at the same time there will be rental agreements and telephones and everything else you could wish for! What a celebration. But even in this story, it becomes clear that this party was not without a

stomachache. God's Spirit can't just be there to fill stomachs! The Israelites perhaps thought this at the beginning but what a hangover they had when they got sick from all the food. Then they had all the more reason to complain. So we see that the solution of the 70 elders for Moses was just a drop on a hot stone. Perhaps the whole event was just to make it clear that even if God rains down quail from heaven, people will always be hungry. True hunger and thirst can't be taken away from us by filling our stomachs. Moses couldn't do anything about this hunger nor could the 70 elders. The people would go on complaining endlessly and they would never truly be satisfied, not even with full bellies.

But God didn't want us to always continue in our old routine. He wanted it all to be completely different. He wanted His Spirit to be poured over us. He wanted us to be filled so that God would be right next to us. We are His people and He is our God. God did all of that through Jesus. In Jesus, we see the fulfillment of all that Moses should have been. Even Jesus felt the pressure of human stubbornness and wanted to give up, just like Moses. The temptation was great to simply let God's children perish. When Jesus prayed, "Lord, remove this cup from Me," it wasn't so different than Moses' prayer, "I've had enough." But Jesus didn't get 70 helpers at His side. Even His faithful disciples couldn't stay awake once to pray. Jesus felt the challenge. But He remained completely on God's side...alone. "Not My will, but Your Will be done," He prayed. In Jesus, we see Him simply fulfilling God's Will unconditionally and moreover, His love is also endlessly directed towards us. That's why He can't just be concerned with filling our stomachs, but about the real enemies: wiping out sin, death, and the devil. Only then can a spiritual miracle actually happen.

And that's exactly what happened at Pentecost. It wasn't the spirit of Moses that was given to us there, but the Spirit of Jesus. Because of this, the apostles were able to continue speaking God's Word at Pentecost. Because of this, this same Word also found open ears – no longer to fill the desires and fantasies of our own hearts but to make known God's Word and to hear and understand God's Word! Not only to fill stomachs but to meet needs where they are greatest. How urgently we need this again! People who don't just want to say what they mean, but say what God wants! How urgently we also need God's Word to flow bright and clear like water to the deepest places of our hearts again. Not just to fill our stomachs and our wishful thoughts, but to go where our hearts are black and chained with sin... so that there can be light and clarity again. So that people can look each other in the face again and be able to trust each other again. And from there into the houses, to the neighbors, and into the whole world. I would like to have such a miracle again. It is needed. We should pray for that because far and wide you can hear the old sentence of Moses: I've had enough.

Moses stood between God and the people at that time. Today, Jesus stands between us and God. He never tires of loving us. He never tires of standing up for God and for us. That's why Pentecost is not a melancholic aria of "I've had enough" but a joyful festival: "I can't get enough of You, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Let's celebrate Pentecost. Amen.